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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON MEK, RESOURCES AND
ELECTION POLITICS

REF: BAGHDAD 1857

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Gary A. Grappo for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a September 7 meeting with the POL M/C, Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim criticized the GOI's handling of the Mujahadeen el-Khalq (MEK) issue, noting that Iraq has already lost the battle for public opinion within the international community. In addition, Salim cited a lack of staff and budget to explain her ministry's inability to excavate more mass graves, provided details of a recent ministry report on the human rights abuses at a Ministry of Defense-run detention facility, and expressed concern that sectarian influences play a significant role in executions. POL M/C conveyed the USG's concern over violence directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals in Iraq and passed the recent Human Rights Watch report on this topic to the minister. Turning to domestic politics, Salim believed that Maliki is "not serious" about going it alone and predicted that he would eventually join the Iraqi National Alliance led by ISCI and the Sadrists. END SUMMARY.

The MEK are winning

12. (C) Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim told POL M/C September 7 that the GOI had completely mishandled its management of the MEK. The July operation to establish a police station within Camp Ashraf had made the GOI look particularly bad in the court of international opinion. Salim worried that Iraq had "lost" the international community, noting the recent creation of a committee composed of representatives from Arab countries that would like to visit Ashraf to conduct an investigation. Salim criticized the GOI's inability to shape the public perception of the MEK issue despite Iraq's sovereign right to assert control over its territory.

Mass graves, detainees, and executions

13. (C) Salim expressed frustration over the Ministry of Human Rights' (MOHR's) continued lack of funding for mass grave excavation. Her requests for 50 additional staff had been denied by the Ministry of Finance, leaving 20 employees to handle a caseload of over 300,000 missing people. She claimed it was a political issue, and that the GOI was only interested in investigating claims that would pay dividends in the elections. According to Salim, PM Maliki had asked that the MOHR look into information it had regarding two mass grave sites in Sadr City containing "hundreds of bodies," many of which were victims of the Sadrist-led Jaysh al-Mahdi. Salim asserted that the primary reason for the PM's interest in these sites was to embarrass the Sadrists and reap the political dividends resulting therefrom.

14. (C) Salim said that following a MOHR investigation, MOHR had submitted a report to PM Maliki detailing human rights abuses at the Baghdad Operation Command's detention facility, Camp Honor (located in Baghdad's International Zone). She had reported that none of the detainees visited by the MOHR team had met with family members or were aware of the allegations against them; many had been held for months and had yet to appear before a judge. Salim was not optimistic that any of the recommendations contained in the ministry's report would be implemented.

15. (C) Asked about the status of executions, Salim said that since 2005, the GOI had executed 122 people, all of whom were Shi'a. She said no Sunni had been sent to death because Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi, a Sunni, refused to approve any execution orders for Sunnis. (NOTE: The constitution requires that the three-person Presidency Council approve all execution orders. END NOTE.) Of the 122 executed, only two were executed for committing acts of terrorism; the remainder had committed other criminal acts, Salim said.

LGBT concerns

16. (C) POL M/C strongly encouraged the Minister of Human Rights to take seriously incidents of violence against LGBT Iraqis and also to fully and completely investigate claims of abuse or discrimination aimed at such individuals by the GOI (reftel). Salim agreed to look into the issue and to read the recent Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, which we provided to her, that details specific incidents of brutality directed

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against Iraq's LGBT community. The minister promised to review the HRW report but allowed that this was a difficult issue for her owing to prevailing cultural attitudes. POL M/C underscored the importance of protecting the human rights of all Iraqis, including LGBT persons, and told Salim he looked forward to working together to address concerns. (NOTE: POL M/C will continue to engage on this issue with MOHR and other appropriate GOI interlocutors. END NOTE.)

Internal politics

17. (C) Salim did not blame Minister of Interior Juwad al-Bulani for failing to prevent the August 19 attacks on the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance, noting the absence of a central command authority responsible for security in Baghdad. The Iraqi Army (Ministry of Defense), Iraqi Police (Ministry of Interior), Baghdad Operations Command (Prime Minister's Office), Counter-Terrorism Center (Prime Minister's Office) and the Minister of State for National Security all had varying levels of responsibility for maintaining security within the capital. Because of this patchwork of authority, Salim said, she was not surprised to see the finger-pointing and refusal to accept blame among these actors, which inevitably had followed the bombings. She also viewed the recent firing of Abd al-Karim Khalaf, former head of the Ministry of Interior's Operations Department, as a purely political move by PM Maliki aimed at weakening al-Bulani. Salim asserted that this might backfire on Maliki, as Khalaf was very popular among average Iraqis.

18. (C) Salim confided that Maliki had invited her to join his list for the January 2010 national elections. She had also been asked to join an alliance of 34 tribes, consisting of both Shi'a and Sunni groups, who were seeking to align with Maliki should he decide to eschew INA. (NOTE: Salim, a Christian, was allied with Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya list. When Allawi left the government in August 2007, Salim opted to leave the party and remain in Maliki's administration as an independent. END NOTE.) Salim believed Maliki was "not

serious about going it alone" and that he was still undecided as to whether to join with the ISCI/Sadrism-led Iraqi National Alliance (INA) or to create his own coalition centered around the Da'wa party. She predicted a broad range of Sunni and Shi'a leaders, including Saleh al-Mutlaq, Mithal al-Alusi and the Awakening Councils, would join with Maliki if he decided formally to run on a separate list. She expressed concern over PM Maliki's refusal to declare his intentions even at this late stage, noting that the people expect him to make his intentions publicly known. Salim speculated that Maliki's flirtations with a broad array of groups was merely his strategy to "gain leverage" with INA before linking up with the Shi'a-dominated coalition. Salim said she would not follow Maliki should he decide to throw in his lot with INA.

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